

Hernando sheriff says Internet cafes reopening are still illegal



Danny Valentine, Times Staff Writer

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BROOKSVILLE — The Hernando County Sheriff's Office is cracking down on a new breed of Internet sweepstakes cafe that has sprouted up in the county after the state passed a law banning the gambling establishments this spring.

In the past weeks, the Sheriff's Office reported Thursday, authorities have conducted investigations that have resulted in the closure of three businesses, including the Lucky Duck and Treasure Cove Sweepstakes, both on Commercial Way in Spring Hill. Win City, at 5130 Commercial Way, has closed twice.

No arrests have been made. Each time, owners decided to close voluntarily after speaking with detectives.

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Each of the three businesses were in operation before the state law was passed.

Authorities found that several vendors have developed different variations of software. Using different schemes to mask the software as legitimate forms of gaming, the vendors are encouraging businesses to reopen, according to the Sheriff's Office.

The issue: The machines are clearly still gambling devices and illegal, authorities say.

The Sheriff's Office says any owner that opens a business with these devices takes full responsibility for doing so and that they, as well as their employees, could be arrested. Their patrons are also violating the law.

"Recent changes to the law make it clear that the Florida state Legislature views these operations as unacceptable in the state of Florida," Sheriff Al Nienhuis said in a statement. "I cannot, in good conscience, knowingly allow a business to clearly violate a law, especially when I have the support of the state attorney in the prosecution of these violations."

He added that businesses operating outside the law and without regulation invite corruption.

Contact Danny Valentine at dvalentine@tampabay.com or (352) 848-1432. On Twitter: @HernandoTimes.

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